

METRO

SECTION
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Sunday,
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SHEILA STROUP

Good deed comes home to roost

Veni Harlan and her mother, Suzanne Harlan, never imagined they'd become foster moms to 70 New Orleans-area birds, but they never imagined a hurricane like Katrina either.

"We were just like all the other people who ended up doing whatever they needed to do," Veni said.

Veni works in the Louisiana State University public affairs office, and as soon as she learned about the relief efforts going on through LSU's vet school, she started collecting money and supplies for the rescued pets that were pouring into the Lamar-Dixon Expo Center in Gonzales.

She also recruited her friend, Claire Rogers, to help take care of the exotic animals at the shelter, where things were chaotic.

"One day a boa constrictor got out of its crate, and we thought, 'Oh my God, he's going to eat the birds.' It was a real zoo over there," Veni said.

Feathers get ruffled

Claire realized the exotic pet area was not the best place for parrots, lovebirds and cockatiels.

"The birds were really freaked out," Veni said. "The lights were on all the time, dogs were barking, and they were living next door to snakes."

Claire got permission to take the birds out of Lamar-Dixon, but she didn't have a place to keep them.

"Then my mother said, 'I'll take them. I'm sure we can handle it,'" Veni said.

That was just before Hurricane Rita, and most of the birds are still at Veni's mom's house in Baton Rouge. They have parrots, lovebirds, conures, and lots of cockatiels and parakeets.

"You can tell these are someone's treasured pets," Veni said. "I think a lot of owners have no idea how to look for them. It's overwhelming and so sad."

Sweet reunion

Veni has little information about many of the birds. A Senegal parrot came with the cryptic message, "Mrs. Stayall, upper Pershing Street." Another parrot was rescued from Louis Armstrong School on St. Claude Avenue.

"We call him Satchmo, and he's a lovely little bird with lots of toys," she said.

So far, 16 birds have been reunited with their owners, and often their stories are heart-rending.

"Sometimes their pets are all the owners have left," Veni said.

Rhonda and Joe Kimble drove from New Orleans to get Sammie, their blue-fronted Amazon, and her pal Boogie after a day spent sorting through their ruined belongings.

As soon as Veni heard Rhonda speak, she knew she was Sammie's mama, because Sammie loved to sing gospel music in a voice that sounded just like Rhonda's. And when she saw Rhonda, she fluffed up her feathers and shouted "Hallelujah! Praise Jesus!"

"They were so happy it made everything worthwhile," Veni said. "While we expect a lot of these birds will never find their owners, each little reunion we can help with seems like a miracle."

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If you're looking for a pet bird that was lost during Katrina, call Veni at (225) 381-8364 or e-mail her at borzoi@cox.net. You can see photos of rescued birds at www.petfinders.com.

Sheila Stroup can be reached at sstroup@timespicayune.com or (985) 898-4831.

ANGER, FRUSTRATION MARK MEETING OF LOWER 9TH WARD, EASTERN N.O. RESIDENTS

'I'm tired of being forced out of my city'

By Gwen Filosa
Staff writer

It was supposed to be a rally to inform displaced residents of the Lower 9th Ward and eastern New Orleans about how the city was working to rebuild their communities and restore services.

But instead of delivering an encouraging pep talk, a host of experts, executives and city leaders took turns sitting in the post-Katrina hot seat Saturday at a town hall meeting to discuss the rebuilding of District E, organized by that district's councilwoman, Cynthia Willard-Lewis.

Between presentations on insurance, electricity bills, water quality, FEMA trailers and other post-disaster topics, the more than 400 residents packed into the council chambers at City Hall exhibited the stress and pain that comes with living in exile.

The spirit of the day was captured by Betty Wells, a senior citizen, who has waited two months for a blue tarp roof on her eastern New Orleans home.

Wells said Uptown and other neighborhoods have been helped in a timely manner while her community is being ignored.

See MEETING, B-2



STAFF PHOTO BY MATT ROSE

Eastern New Orleans resident David Parker speaks out Saturday during a town hall meeting to discuss the rebuilding of District E.



BATTLE SCARS

Historic Jackson Barracks and its museum fared little better than other structures in the storm-ravaged 9th Ward



STAFF PHOTOS BY CHRIS GRANGER

Like a doctor prepping for surgery, Stan Amerski, a curator at Jackson Barracks military museum, examines a mannequin dressed as a Buffalo Soldier of the 9th Cavalry. Many rare historical artifacts sat under water for days after Hurricane Katrina, including a cannon, TOP.

By Joe Darby
West Bank bureau

Lying inside the portal of the darkened 170-year-old building, a figure rests on its side, its rumpled blue uniform smeared with mud, resembling a soldier fallen in battle.

The prone figure was, in fact, cut down by an enemy, but not a human one. The mannequin of a Buffalo Soldier, a member of a group of African-American troops who were

mustered at Jackson Barracks just after the Civil War to fight Indians in west Texas, was an exhibit in the historic post's Military museum, where Hurricane Katrina left more than 10 feet of water.

Priceless weapons, flags, uniforms and other military gear were under water and muck for days. Not just the museum, but all of the buildings of the post, a landmark in New Orleans' 9th Ward since 1835, were flooded.

See JACKSON, B-4

Beautification brigade

Volunteers spruce up City Park

By Karen Turni Bazile
Staff writer

Joining hundreds of other volunteers eager to clean up City Park after Hurricane Katrina, Cheryl Resignola planted rose bushes Saturday in the Botanical Garden just outside the Pavilion of Two Sisters — where her daughter will be married in June.

See CITY PARK, B-6



STAFF PHOTO BY CHRIS GRANGER

David Weiser of River Ridge, who grew up coming to City Park, rakes leaves and debris out of a fountain. Hundreds of volunteers spent Saturday helping clean the park, which was battered by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

Hundreds sign up for school in St. Bernard

Classes will begin in trailers on Nov. 14

By Karen Turni Bazile
St. Bernard/Plaquemines bureau

By the time a four-day registration period ended Saturday afternoon, 701 students had signed up to return to St. Bernard Parish public schools, all of which were hit hard by Hurricane Katrina.

"Of that 701, 423 said they are coming the first day, and the others said they will come when their FEMA trailers arrive or in January," schools Superintendent Doris Voitier said shortly after the end of registration Saturday.

The school system now will make schedules for the first-day students. They will be housed in classroom trailers on the Chalmette High School campus when school reopens Nov. 14.

See ST. BERNARD, B-2

8,800

Number of students in St. Bernard Parish schools in August

701

Number who have signed up to return

SPCA still saving animals, and itself

9th Ward headquarters destroyed in hurricane

By Dennis Persica
West Bank bureau

As Hurricane Katrina approached New Orleans, the staff at the Louisiana Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals packed up all 263 animals at its Japonica Street headquarters and shipped them to Houston.

The storm destroyed the building, but in the weeks since, SPCA employees and volunteers have continued to rescue New Orleans animals who were left behind when the city's residents evacuated.

First in Gonzales and now in Algiers, the agency has housed hundreds of dogs and cats, hoping to reunite them with their owners or to find new owners for them.

See SPCA, B-3